

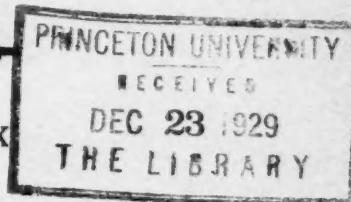
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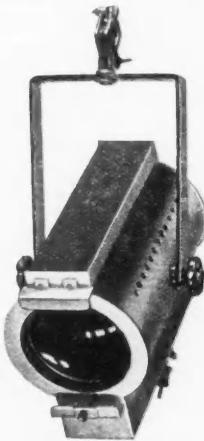
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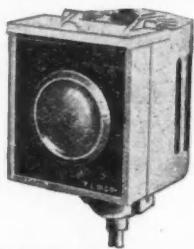
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# THE DRAMA LEAGUE AND THE NATIONAL THEATRE

IT will be noticed that the article on recent plays, the feature proper to the opening page of DRAMA, appears this month elsewhere; and by such a change we wish to emphasise the special purpose of this Double Number of our journal, which is, in a word: to register our support of that revival of the project for the foundation of a National Theatre which was initiated by the Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre Committee in the year 1905.

Criticism has been levelled from time to time against that Committee because of its failure hitherto to bring its plans to fruition. But the war proved a stumbling block to schemes of even greater import than the foundation of a National Theatre, and if some have been tempted to deplore a policy that, since the end of the war, has seemed too Fabian, there can be no cavil at the careful foresight by which Sir Carl Meyer's splendid donation of £70,000 has been preserved intact for the object for which it was originally given.

For myself, I believe that little has been lost by delay and much has been gained. True, the original impulse for the celebration of the Shakespearean Ter-Centenary is no longer an active factor in the situation. But to set against that we have a public opinion far more educated in matters theatrical, and that new nucleus of enthusiastic support which has been created by the Community Drama movement of which the Drama League itself is to a large extent the promoter and the spokesman.

I am asked sometimes: "How is it that the Drama League—whose main activities are rightly concerned with the promotion of community drama in town and country—how is it that such an organization should also interest itself in a project so grandiose and so essentially metropolitan as this of a National Theatre?" The answer is a simple one. In the realm of art, the terms "Small" and "Great" have little meaning. The object of the League is to assist the development of the Art of the Theatre, and

with this broad aim in mind the promotion of a National Theatre is no wit the less an obligation on us than the fostering of the village play, or the provincial drama society. As to the value of a National Theatre to the theatre as a whole—to a belief in *that* the League is committed by many resolutions passed in previous years, and now last but not least by Mr. Robert Young's motion as carried at the Northampton Conference and reported on another page.

Acting on this mandate, it is clearly the part of the League to co-operate to the best of its ability with any individuals or bodies who may be working in a similar direction—always with this proviso, that our influence, such as it is, shall be wielded in favour of a theatre, National not in name only, but in fact. In other words, we, as a League, would rather see the fruition of the scheme delayed yet longer than be content with anything unworthy of the hopes of the past or the claims of the future.

Luckily, there exists a statement of the general standard which we should desire to see maintained, in the book, "A National Theatre," by William Archer and Harley Granville-Barker, a revised edition of which is shortly to be published. This book provides not only a most thorough analysis of the whole problem, but a plan for its solution in terms of practical theatre management.

When agreement is reached as to the kind of theatre we need, the question of ways and means remains to be tackled. That may mean recourse to the Prime Minister in accordance with Mr. MacDonald's own suggestion made to Mr. Robert Young in the House of Commons last July.

In the meantime, this special National Theatre number of DRAMA is in your hands, as the League's willing contribution to the achievement of the common aim. Its compilation has been rendered possible by the assistance of a large number of distinguished men and women—whose kindness the Editor desires to acknowledge with gratitude.

GEOFFREY WHITWORTH

# LETTER FROM THE HOME SECRETARY ON THE NATIONAL THEATRE PROJECT

The following is the text of the letter sent by Mr. J. R. Clynes to be read at the Northampton Conference of the British Drama League, when this subject was up for discussion :

DEAR MR. WHITWORTH,

I hope you will have a very helpful and successful Conference at Northampton. I would welcome the prospect of an agreed scheme to promote the establishment of a National Theatre. We already have a variety of Municipal and State Institutions, which altogether render substantial service in the sphere of science and art. Libraries, Art Galleries, Orchestras, and extensive provisions for sports and recreation have become a Municipal or National charge.

The Drama, first because it is Drama, and secondly because of its far-reaching educational values, deserves not merely recognition but co-operation and

honour. In the last ten years dramatic enterprise must have poured into the Treasury many millions of pounds, and must have made a wide-spread if indirect contribution to improved National character and understanding.

It would be enough if in exchange for the service which the Drama renders to our country, the cause of a National Theatre could receive but a fraction of its own contribution.

The subject, however, is more than one of finance. It is one of public opinion and Parliamentary disposition.

I hope your Conference will do something to create the National support which is necessary for your purpose.

Yours sincerely,

J. R. CLYNES.

October 24th, 1929.

## THE VIEW OF A COMMERCIAL MANAGER

By C. B. Cochran

AS a commercial manager of many years' experience, I believe that the establishment of a National Theatre would be as valuable an asset to the theatrical industry and profession as the Post Office is to the industry of the country and to the banking profession. It would rank in relation to the cultural life of the community in scarcely less importance.

There are critics of the Post Office. Few human institutions are perfect, and we are apt to overlook in our criticisms the vital fact, that, however one institution may develop, others are always running it close—if not beating it by many lengths. The opposers of the National Theatre argue that it might not meet to the full the educational

needs of the community, that as a State foundation it would tend to become bureaucratic, that it would be a museum of arts rather than a creative impulse.

The British Museum has not, so far as my experience goes, acted as a brake upon the culture and creative artistry of England and the English people. The bureaucratic control of the National Health Insurance and the National Gallery has not noticeably led to a decline in the average expectation of life or emptied the Trafalgar Square exhibitions.

Again, the functioning of a National Theatre would not only provide us with an opportunity of seeing the best of our drama, old and new, continually presented under

## THE NATIONAL THEATRE

reasonably good conditions. It would, like the much-criticized Post Office again, fulfil a number of other useful, and indeed, vitally necessary requirements. For example, it would enable the younger generation to survey the historical rock from which the English character was hewn. It would provide the foreigner in our midst with an index of our English form and pressure—and in this it would unquestionably be a valuable national shop-window of excellence. It would set, as does the Comédie Française, at least as average standard of style, elegance, efficiency and creative imagination in the sphere of the theatre, which genius would perhaps aspire to excel, but—more important—below whose canons catchpenny commerce would fear to fall. In my own personal opinion, I do not think that genius would be hampered by it, but I am sure the general standard of theatrical presentation would unquestionably be elevated by the example

of such a clearing-house of theatrical ideas.

There are many other *pro* arguments which can be set against the *cons* of the Philistines or niggards. But I will conclude with one which is, I think, not sufficiently stressed by those who advocate the establishment of a nationally endowed emporium of theatrical art. Our English speech, the currency of our race and the index of our psychology, is in constant danger of defacement. The National Theatre would, I take it, be its Bank of England—a “well of English undefiled.” In this respect alone, it would repay its upkeep charges—and for my part, I am inclined to think that, given showmanlike management before and behind the curtain, the financial revenue would, in a little while, balance the outgoing. But if its expenditure were a deadweight on the Exchequer, its return in terms of educational, social and international advantage would outweigh that charge a hundredfold.

## SOME PERSONAL OPINIONS ON THE NATIONAL THEATRE

WITH a view to ascertaining to what extent influential public opinion is in favour of the project for a National Theatre, we have instituted an enquiry among some whose views would be valuable on such a subject, with the result printed below. Of set purpose our enquiry was not confined to persons connected with the stage as such, and almost every side of national life will be found to be represented in the ensuing answers.

Approval was not invited to cover any particular method of financing or organizing the Theatre. Correspondents were only asked to say whether they thought a National Theatre should exist in London where plays, old and new, of admitted quality, could be produced and kept alive under more favourable conditions than the theatres working for profit can be expected to provide, and where performances could be looked for of the high general standard that only a permanently organized company can hope to reach.

MR. LASCELLES ABERCROMBIE  
*Professor of English Literature,  
University of Leeds.*

I most cordially approve the project for a National Theatre. The capital of the Empire can never be truly and properly the capital of English civilization and culture without one.

MR. HENRY AINLEY

I most heartily approve of your desire to obtain a National Theatre. It is a vital necessity for the benefit of public and player alike, and should become one of the landmarks, not only of London, but of the world.

MR. CHARLES AITKEN  
*Director of National Gallery, Millbank  
(Tate Gallery).*

I am in favour, generally, of the project for establishing a National Theatre at which new and old plays could be produced, irrespective of the necessity of making profits under the present commercial conditions.

SIR HUGH ALLEN

*Principal, Royal College of Music.*

I hope sincerely that the establishment of a National Theatre is about to be realised. It is long overdue and its achievement will be doubly welcome.

## PERSONAL OPINIONS ON THE NATIONAL THEATRE

### MR. NORMAN ANGELL

Second thoughts are sometimes better than first. Commercially produced plays must, usually, secure first-thought approval or die. A National Theatre would give "second-thought" plays a chance. So add my name to those approving in principle.

### MISS LENA ASHWELL, O.B.E.

Every nation in Europe has a National Theatre supported by the State, as a standard of good drama, and good acting and guardian of its language. Europe seems to care for the minds of the people whilst England concentrates on keeping the body fit.

### DR. ERNEST BARKER, LL.D.

*Principal, King's College, London.*

I do approve of the project of a National Theatre. My feeling (for what it is worth) is that drama does not exist simply to give a sensation of pleasure, for which one is willing to pay in the same way as one pays for the pleasure of a bottle of wine, but also (and even most) to give, in the particular way in which it alone can give, some understanding of life, both the national life and the individual life. If it is to perform the second and higher function, there must be some permanent organisation of a public character, to produce plays connected with that function in a way worthy of it. One ought to have a National Theatre in the same way and for the same reason as we have a national system of education.

### MR. KENNETH BARNES

*Administrator, Royal Academy of Dramatic Art.*

Every art requires a visible standard so that the best may be preserved; as we preserve pictures in our National Gallery. A well-managed State Theatre would set up such a standard, and would stimulate what is really artistic in the drama. That the drama is already recognised as a medium of education, there is no doubt. In the years since the War, the various authorities concerned have granted the R.A.D.A. a Royal Charter, an annual Government grant, exemption from Income Tax and County Council scholarships. These privileges have been obtained as a reward of perseverance, and, I hope, merit. Small things, you may say, compared with the establishment of a National Theatre, but significant as an indication of the modified attitude of the official mind in regard to institutions connected with the Theatre.

### MR. E. A. BAUGHAN

A theatre for London which would be independent of commercial aims would certainly have my support, provided it were not run by a *clique* for a *clique*. If State or municipal aid were forthcoming it should be quite possible to form a National Theatre, but if the State or municipality made control a condition the scheme would be doomed from the start.

### MR. CLIFFORD BAX

We should already have a National Theatre if our people could get rid of the notion that the drama is a frivolous or unimportant art. Unfortunately, they will not get rid of this notion until they have a National Theatre. It will have, therefore, to be thrust upon them by a far-sighted and courageous Government.

### MISS LILIAN BAYLIS

*Manager, The Old Vic.*

I should be delighted to co-operate in a movement to secure a National Theatre in London. I think it is a disgrace to our country that one is not already in existence.

### MR. ROBERT ANNING BELL

Yes. I think that we certainly ought to have a National Theatre where plays and players of a worthy standard may be seen at any time. The ephemeral, if often amusing, entertainments so popular should not have this field entirely to themselves nor the actor-manager have all the limelight.

### THE REV. SIDNEY M. BERRY, D.D.

*Secretary, Congregational Union.*

You may count me as an absolute supporter in the project for a National Theatre in London. I think it is a crying need, and my support is far more than a formal thing.

### MR. G. W. BISHOP

I am emphatically in favour of a National Theatre in London and consider it a disgrace that England, alone of all European countries, has no playhouse that is not run for commercial profits. The theatre needs a dignified light-house built on a solid foundation. Visits to the Scandinavian countries during the last two years made me realise the importance of the National Theatre in a country.

### DR. F. S. BOAS, LL.D.

As one who was an original member of the General Committee for the establishment of a Shakespeare National Theatre I am glad to support a scheme for a National Theatre on the lines suggested in your letter, and am pleased to hear that there is hope of some Government action.

### MR. GORDON BOTTOMLEY

In reply to your letter regarding the idea of a National Theatre, I shall strongly support any scheme that is put forward. In the last resort we cannot expect any of the arts to prosper if financial success is to be the test of prosperity; and drama (with the allied forms of music and drama) is already, in its highest reaches, recognised in most countries as being in need of State aid if

## PERSONAL OPINIONS ON THE NATIONAL THEATRE

it is to function perfectly. A theatre in which the heritage of our classic drama should be manifest again is an urgent need; and for want of it the energies of all other theatres in the country have shrivelled and are crippled: it would inevitably become a school for actors, and for audiences as well. The constitution of such a theatre would need canvassing; but I think there is no doubt of the need for the State to undertake it, or of the value that it would be educationally and nationally.

### DR. CLOUDESLEY BRERETON *Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur.*

Paris with less than half the population of London has three National Theatres. It would not appear to be excessive if London had one. One day the British public will realise that the dividends from art, like the dividends from education, are only payable in *kind*. On that day a National Theatre will seem as natural as a national school. The majority are still at the stage of assessing art as education used to be assessed, i.e., by payment by results, in this case of the box office.

### MR. IVOR BROWN

Certainly I approve of a National Theatre. The State supports writing and painting; music it overlooks and drama it actively punishes by censorship and taxation. A National Theatre would end this atmosphere of distrust. The drama has a right to this elementary form of recognition as an art and also as an activity of solid significance.

### MR. MAURICE BROWNE

A National Theatre: "Needed?"—Urgently. "Why?"—We are a civilized nation.

### VISCOUNT BURNHAM

I am in favour of a National Theatre for the preservation of British dramatic art *per exemplum optime*.

### RIGHT REV. HERBERT BURY

*Assistant Bishop of London.  
Formerly Bishop for North and Central Europe.*  
I heartily wish success to the project of a National Theatre and its aim of putting only the best before the playgoing public. Whether people go to church or not they will go where they can be amused and entertained, and those who lift up the standard of our amusements and entertainments reach a far wider public than the churches and lift up the standards and ideals of the whole community.

### M. EMILE CAMMAERTS

I am certainly in favour of the project, as it seems to me the only means of keeping alive on the stage the best plays of English literature. The influence of such a repertory would be invaluable, not only for the public but also for the playwrights, and it would be still increased if a certain place were allotted to the masterpieces of foreign literature. This method has been adopted with success in other "National" Theatres founded abroad.

### PROFESSOR A. Y. CAMPBELL

*University of Liverpool.*

I think a National Theatre such as you describe is a necessity. I think it should be a condition that a play of Shakespeare be produced (say) once every year. It seems to me calamitous that, outside the academic and educational worlds, the art of Shakespeare should now have no place in the life of the country; and I say this as a teacher and an academic.

### MR. LEWIS CASSON AND MISS SYBIL THORNDIKE

The Theatre is still, and probably will always be, the most popular and the most universal of all expressions of art. For that reason it is the most easily exploited for purely commercial ends. It is therefore peculiarly necessary that this art should receive the protection of a home where the best work can be presented for its own sake, without the temptations to vast profits on the one hand or the following of fads on the other.

### MR. G. K. CHESTERTON

I think it an excellent idea that there should be a National Theatre. Perhaps it will still go on acting the national dramas when all the rest of the stage is talking American.

### THE BISHOP OF CHICHESTER

The proposal to build and create a National Theatre, with all that this means has my ardent support. May it come soon!

### MR. PHILIP CONNARD, R.A.

Most certainly there ought to be a National Theatre and, equally important, National Opera.

### MRS. W. L. COURTNEY

I am definitely in favour of a National Theatre for London. There should be some internationally recognised centre of British drama in the metropolis where plays, new and old, classics and likely to become classics, are always being performed. This is the only way to keep up theatrical standards and to fight successfully the commercialization of the theatre. No repertory companies can do this effectively as they have not sufficient financial backing.

### THE MARQUIS OF CREWE

Lord Crewe regrets he has not had any opportunity of studying the different proposals for establishing a National Theatre in London, but he thinks that a carefully thought-out scheme should receive general support if framed on a sound financial basis.

### REV. PERCY DEARMER, D.D.

The importance of the drama as art, which is costly to produce in its higher forms, and its immense educational power make a National Theatre a necessary part of a civilised and properly organised state.

## PERSONAL OPINIONS ON THE NATIONAL THEATRE

### MR. BASIL DEAN

In reply to your circular letter of the 21st inst., of course I am and always have been in favour of a National Theatre and have repeatedly said so in public utterances, but, I am afraid, to the accompaniment of considerable scorn on the part of the Press. The urgent arguments in favour of such an institution are so many and so well known that they need no elaboration from me.

### MR. F. E. DORAN

I am glad to note that the National Theatre is once again emerging from obscurity and am heartily in favour of its establishment. I cannot see how such a theatre could be established elsewhere than in the capital, and though I quite agree that the time is not yet opportune for an examination of the details of management, I feel that the National Theatre, though established in London, should also be a centre from which the provinces could draw inspiration and practical demonstration of our national genius.

### MR. JOHN DRINKWATER

I cannot say more off-hand than that I certainly think if an agreed and practicable scheme could be evolved for some sort of National Theatre it would be a very proper thing for the Government to give it consideration. But, as you suggest, it is impossible at the moment to examine more fully the details of such a scheme. For myself, I am not even sure that the big central London theatre is the proper solution of the problem. That the problem, however, is an urgent one, that it has got to be solved, and that sooner or later some Government will solve it, I am convinced. I hope it will be the present one.

### MR. ASHLEY DUKES

I want to see a National Theatre because it would help finally to get rid of the inferiority sense of theatrical art in relation to other arts, such as music, painting or literature. This reason cannot be expected to appeal very much to the social reformer, but it is of some consequence to the theatrical artist. A National Theatre implies a recognition of drama neither as a popular distraction nor a vehicle of argument, but as a form of poetic expression allied to inspired production and performance.

### LORD DUNSANY

I cordially approve of a National Theatre; not for its own sake, but for the satisfaction it would give me when travelling abroad to be able to boast that I come from a civilised country.

### MR. ST. JOHN ERVINE

I believe in a National Theatre for the same reason that I believe in the National Gallery: a place in which the accumulated treasures of art may be stored both to please those of us who are merely spectators and to stimulate those who wish to be creators. It offers the student a stan-

dard by which he may guide himself, even if he starts to establish a standard of his own, and enables him to check his experiments with the achievements and experience of other people. Profit has no more to do with the value of such a place than it had to do with the value of a battleship.

### MR. JAMES B. FAGAN

Most certainly I approve the project of a National Theatre—State support and stage control.

### THE RIGHT HON. H. A. L. FISHER, F.R.S.

*Warden of New College, Oxford.  
Late President of Board of Education.*

I should welcome the establishment of a National Theatre and of a National Repertory Company which would perform in the provinces as well as in London.

### SIR JOHNSTON FORBES-ROBERTSON

I am in favour of a National Theatre provided it is a people's theatre, and not under Government control.

### MR. JOHN GALSWORTHY, O.M.

I was in favour of a National Theatre at the inception of the movement and I am still more so now. The theatre proper is in danger from all sides and is more than ever in need of focus and support.

### MR. J. L. GARVIN

As regards a National Theatre I do most emphatically express a general agreement with the project, but think it better at this stage to reserve comment and suggestion as to method.

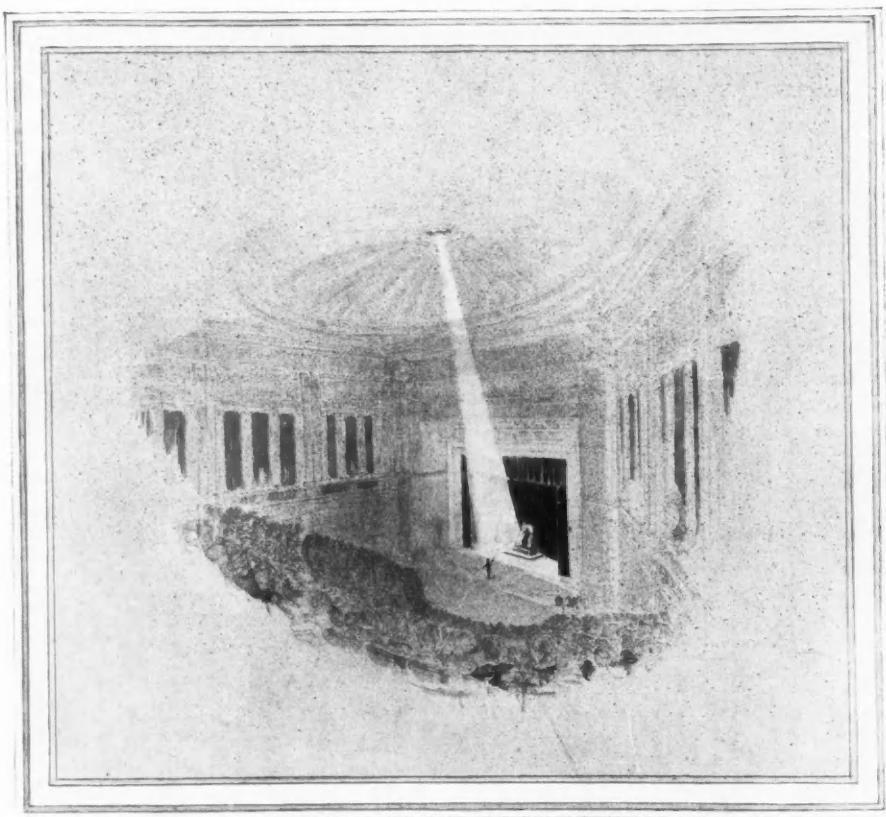
### LORD GORELL

Certainly you may add my name to the list of those who do generally approve the project for a National Theatre. Methods of financing and organising such a theatre may well be matters of discussion and of differences of opinion; but as to the principle no one in the least degree interested in drama can surely differ. It is amazing that a National Theatre has not been in existence at least as long as a National Gallery.

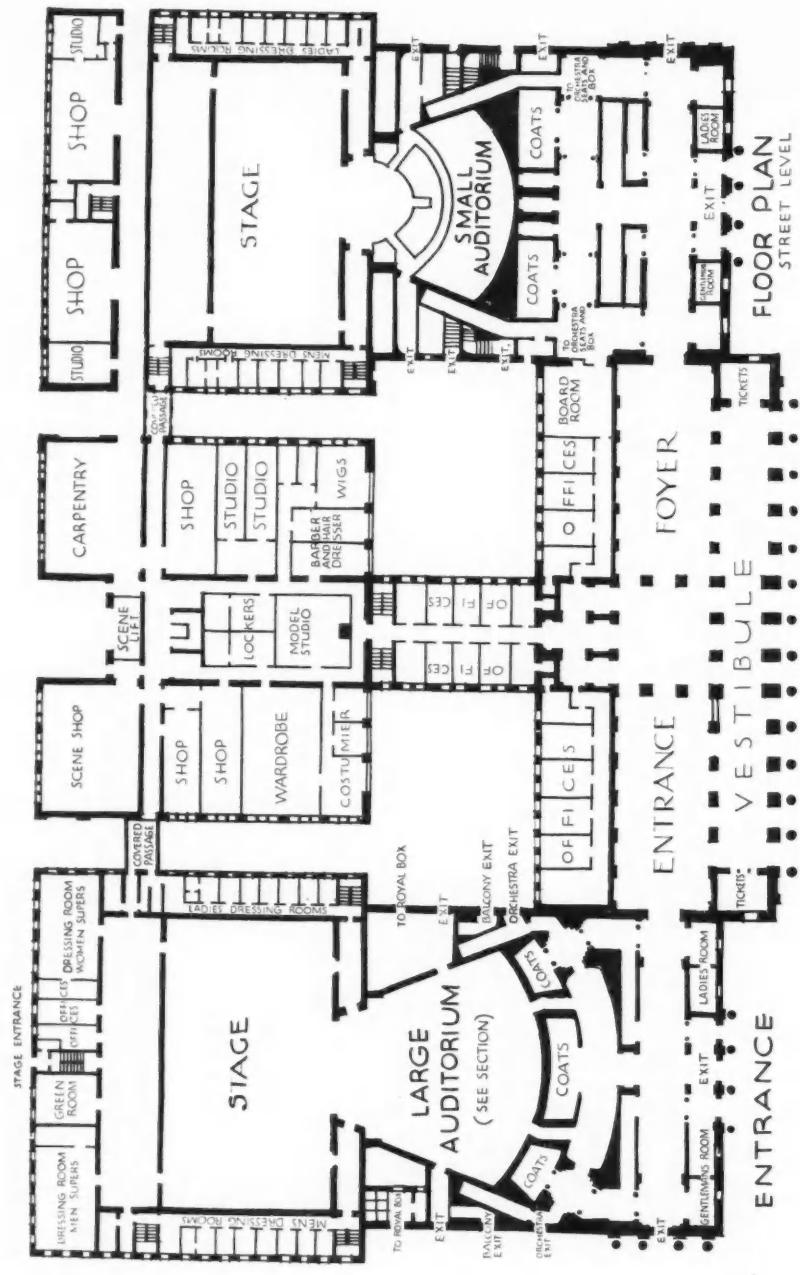
### MR. HARLEY GRANVILLE-BARKER

We shall assuredly have a National Theatre; and the need for it is so obvious if there is any need for drama at all, that we shall then only wonder why we never had it before. We must work for it, however. It will not drop from the skies.

If you want to pile up arguments in its favour, here is a minor one. It will set a standard of production and acting, which other theatres, pretending to take their work seriously, will have to emulate and better if they can, by which they also will be judged, below which they may be ashamed to fall.



NATIONAL THEATRE. SKETCH OF THE  
INTERIOR OF THE LARGE AUDITORIUM  
ARCHITECT: W. L. SOMERVILLE



NATIONAL THEATRE PLAN  
ARCHITECT: W. K. SOMERVILLE

## PERSONAL OPINIONS ON THE NATIONAL THEATRE

### LADY GREGORY

In answer to yours, I can only answer from the point of view of an occasional visitor to London, and say what great pleasure it would give to such a casual visitor were there a theatre to revive, as our Abbey does, the plays—the best ones—of our dramatists from time to time. We give our plays, new or old—but for a week at a time—and find this rule works well.

### MR. JAMES R. GREGSON

I most heartily approve the ideal of a National Theatre, but it must be a *playhouse*, not a morgue!

### MR. J. T. GREIN

I have for many years pleaded the cause of a National Theatre where art not commerce should be the watchword, and perfect performances of classic and contemporary plays by a permanent company under one trusted man's command should be the supreme policy.

### SIR ROBERT HADFIELD

With reference to your letter of the 21st instant. Although the times just now are not favourable for financial calls, no doubt the idea of a National Theatre is excellent, and must some day be realised.

### CAPTAIN MARTIN HARDIE

A National Theatre should exist, and should include a National Theatre Museum and Library, which should contain historical documents, playbills, portraits, autograph letters, costumes, personal records, etc., and should be the central authority for all information with regard to the history of the Theatre in Great Britain.

### MR. CARL HENTSCHEL

*President and Founder of the O.P. Club.*

Yes. Over thirty years ago I arranged a meeting to further this object, in which William Archer, Cecil Raleigh and George Bernard Shaw took part.

### SIR GEORGE HENSCHEL

Considering the immense wealth of English dramatic literature, a National Theatre, such as planned by the British Drama League, seems to me a far more pressing need than a National Opera.

### MISS A. E. HORNIMAN

Certainly there should be an important theatre in London, run on civilised lines, not for the exploitation of any star, not to carry out personal fads, but a place in which the dramatist should be "top dog."

### MR. ALDOUS HUXLEY

Nobody who is acquainted with the good work done by state and municipal theatres in the various countries of Europe can fail to be a supporter of the scheme for an English National Theatre.

### COMMANDER S. M. KENWORTHY, M.P.

Am in favour both of a National Theatre and a National Opera House, and consider Government should help both financially. We spend scores of millions of pounds a year in projects of far less value.

### DR. C. W. KIMMINS

I am very strongly in favour of a National Theatre. It would be of quite extraordinary value to have one theatre clear of all commercial interests which would raise the standard of the drama enormously.

### MISS GERTRUDE KINGSTON

There never was a time when a National Theatre was more sorely needed than now. With the greatest dramatic literature of the world in our past, England's people have been debauched by crook drama, by night club comedies, musical "shows" and American films, all of which are as conventionalised as the "parts" of a Ford car. Until taste has been re-established by a National Theatre, we shall continue to have a daily Press condemning and scoffing at any play or player that writes or speaks the English tongue, and finding everything "exasperating" or "monotonous," that does not deal with cocktails, cabaret girlhood and boyhood, who converse in swift monosyllabic dialogue of "sterile brightness."

### MR. HOLFORD KNIGHT, M.P.

The B.D.L. can give invaluable aid to the long-overdue task of collecting the friends of the National Theatre and pressing for its achievement.

### MR. HAROLD J. LASKY

*Reader in Political Science,  
University of London.*

A National Theatre seems to me as necessary to the State as the British Museum or the National Gallery. In its sphere, it ought to play the same part in the life of the community.

### MR. SHANE LESLIE

A National Theatre is a success in Ireland and Russia. I believe it was not without results in Attica. Repertory drama corresponds to keeping a shelf of well-bound and well-known classics on hand. Why must one always have to read the latest febrile and sensational books? Likewise, why must one always have to see the latest and flimsiest play of the hour under the impression that one is supporting the National Drama?

### SIR OLIVER LODGE

A theatre which is not dependent on making a profit continually is highly desirable and necessary to a serious study of the drama. Such an institution should be readily afforded by a great city.

## PERSONAL OPINIONS ON THE NATIONAL THEATRE

### DAME BEATRIX LYALL, D.B.E.

I have but scanty first-hand knowledge of theatrical matters but it does seem to me—without committing myself to any definite plan—that a National Theatre might be of great public value to London.

### THE EARL OF LYTTON

I am certainly a strong supporter of the idea of a National Repertory Theatre, and am convinced that such a theatre must be endowed. I accept in general terms the scheme proposed by the late Mr. William Archer in his book on the subject.

### MR. MILES MALLESON

Indeed, I am in favour of a National Theatre. Nobody can tell what the outcome of the "Talkies" will be for the theatre as we grew up to know it, but suddenly a vast industry has been added in the entertainment world, run solely for commercial profit. I think this one more reason why those who care for the theatre for its own sake should join hands so that we do not get at least temporarily submerged in the new torrents of commercialism. Good luck to it!

### MISS MARGARET McMILLAN

A National Theatre that would supply the need for a higher order of art, at a reasonable cost is, of course, one of the most obvious needs of England. There is very little use in satisfying a growing desire for education if there is no corresponding effort to bring into being the agencies that would meet new demands for higher forms of art, and especially is this true of drama—the great, national, expressional art. In this centre, for example, there are children growing up who will need a form of good art that is not too costly. There must be a growing number of them.

### MR. NUGENT MONCK

Certainly let us have a National Theatre for our national and international classics with a smaller theatre under the same roof for new work. The Germans (who are not completely fools) seem to think State theatres an absolute necessity. Their reasons are doubtless very good arguments.

### PROFESSOR A. E. MORGAN

*Principal, Hull University.*

You ask me for my views on the question of a National Theatre. Of course I am in sympathy with it and it can only be a question of time before we get what every civilised and cultured nation should have. Unless there is some endowment of a theatre there can never be that single consideration of artistic worth which should prevail over the exigencies of the box office.

Please record me as one who believes enthusiastically in the necessity of this work.

### MR. CHARLES MORGAN

I am strongly in sympathy with the idea of an Endowed Theatre in London, not conducted for private profit, but I am not prepared to commit myself to urging that it should be made a charge on the Exchequer.

### MR. J. RAMSAY MUIR

I am cordially in favour of the project to establish a National Theatre in London, on the understanding that its purpose would be to keep alive, on a repertory basis, all that is best in the history of English drama. New plays might be produced primarily in order to introduce them, without prejudice, and then transfer to the commercial stage.

### PROFESSOR GILBERT MURRAY

Yes, the only way to keep the level of the theatre above that of the popular newspaper.

### MR. ROBERT NICHOLS

Robert Nichols is in favour of a National Theatre for the following among a host of reasons:—(1) Because though the Theatre is a Fine Art it does not, at present, receive national and official recognition as such. (2) A National Theatre adds to the prestige of a nation in the Humanities—the chief prestige worth having at long last. (3) Great drama assists the health and growth of the nation's spirit. The first great democracy provided means for every citizen to visit the theatre because they recognised this fact. (4) The Fine Arts are as disinterested as Pure Science. But the Theatre by its very nature is expensive and economic factors play a large part in the determination of its programme. These economic factors should be taken care of by the Government in order that there should exist at least one theatre dedicated to the production of Fine Art especially with regard to the production of established masterpieces and in particular the work of Shakespeare. (5) Such a theatre helps to promote the work of peace by helping to interpret the soul of one nation to another and in particular the soul of England to the Dominions and the U.S.

### PROFESSOR ALLARDYCE NICOLL

Every truly National Theatre is an international theatre—national in the sense that it arises from the will of a nation, acting drama in a national tongue—international in that it is the representative in a particular country of that larger artistic world which is without boundaries. Could we attain to the establishment of such a playhouse in London, conducted so as to make it, not something separate from and strange to the national theatres of Paris and Berlin, but the younger brother of these, we should have achieved something very definite and very important in the world of art. If nothing else, this may be said:—English dramatists have proved themselves worthy of an international fellowship; they deserve a local home wherein they may live and an official guest-house wherein they may entertain their friends and colleagues from other lands.

## PERSONAL OPINIONS ON THE NATIONAL THEATRE

### MR. CYRIL NORWOOD

I am in favour of a National Theatre, if a sufficient endowment can be found. I believe that it might educate the public, and prove a real encouragement to the honest dramatist.

### LORD EUSTACE PERCY

*Late President, Board of Education.*

You may certainly quote my name in supporting the principle of a National Theatre, provided always that any endowment which the State may give to such a theatre shall take a form which does not carry with it control by the Government of the day over what may be called the dramatic policy of the Governing Body of the Theatre.

### SIR NIGEL PLAYFAIR

Yes. My views, for what they were worth, you will find published at length in the August, 1928, number of the "Nineteenth Century."

### THE RIGHT HON. SIR FREDERICK POLLOCK, P.C.

I agree generally. There is one reason I have not seen much of in print. In London as it is there cannot be a permanent critical audience, only a transitory, fluctuating crowd (there may be partial happy exceptions in suburbs which have a society of their own—I think it is so in Hammersmith). Individualist enterprise cannot remedy this state of things. Irving and Forbes-Robertson did their best (not without aberrations) but could not make a tradition. Even in Paris I fear conditions are not so good for the classical tradition as they were. It may be too much to hope for a counterpart of the Th. Français but we might aim at something like the Vieux Colombier.

### CAPTAIN HERBERT READ, D.S.O.

I am entirely in favour of a National Theatre, to the extent that I would deprecate it being founded by private charity in place of public subsidy.

### PROFESSOR C. H. REILLY

I am strongly in favour of a National Theatre. Every other art has its standards preserved for the public by the public. Drama should be treated in the same way. Books of plays on shelves are of less value than photographs of pictures.

### MISS ELIZABETH ROBINS

I am ready to set down my conviction of the value a National Theatre in London could be, not only to the English but to all English-speaking peoples. As to "particular conditions"—I should like to see women given a voice on the executive, and not only this or that middle-aged or old woman. The theatre would die but for the young. They ought to play a part in the life of the Theatre not only before the footlights.

### MR. LENNOX ROBINSON

Yes, I do thoroughly approve of the idea of a National Theatre for England. I do not see why you should lag behind the Irish Free State.

### MR. B. SEEBOHM ROWNTREE

I certainly think that it is desirable that we should have a National Theatre which is not dependent for its continued existence upon ordinary commercial considerations. It is in the highest degree desirable that the British people should be given opportunities of learning to appreciate the richness of their heritage in drama. There is a real danger of this being largely forgotten unless they have the opportunity of seeing the dramas acted, and they are not likely to get adequate opportunities of this unless we have a National Theatre.

### MR. ALBERT RUTHERSTON

*Principal, Ruskin School of Drawing, Oxford.*

The spirit of a people is reflected in its drama as it is equally in other forms of art. We have the finest galleries in the world for pictures; in architecture we have lovely buildings, great and small; we have our national monuments here, and we honour them, but we have no Theatre to honour. Let us then pay homage with something better than lip-service. Those who have served the Theatre, and serve it still with passion and noble creative force—deserve it.

### SIR MICHAEL SADLER, C.B.

*Master, University College, Oxford.*

I shall be glad to help in anything which the British Drama League supports, and the plan which you sketch in your letter is what I should be glad to see realised.

### MR. GEORGE SHERINGHAM

A National Theatre is as necessary as a British Museum or a National Gallery; civilised nations always have one.

### MR. FRANK SWINNERTON

Certainly I am in favour of a National Theatre. It would allow an intelligent public to see in Central London a collection of the greatest plays ever written; it would educate actors in versatility (or acting) as opposed to the mere rendering of "type" parts; it would encourage artists to exercise their talents upon stage *décor*; and it would, under imaginative management, give scope for the training of producers who understand their job. But the management would have to be bold, and neither drearily dignified nor self-conscious. It would never do for a National Theatre to fall into the hands of either fogeys or genteel highbrows. The ideal director would be C. B. Cochran.

## PERSONAL OPINIONS ON THE NATIONAL THEATRE

### MR. R. H. TAWNEY

*President, Workers' Educational Association.*

I am, of course, wholeheartedly in sympathy with the proposal to establish a National Theatre endowed by the State. The *Publicē egestas, privatum opulentia*, which is the curse of England, is seen at its worst in the chilly indifference of public opinion to the claims of art. I trust that the Government will realise that any socialism worth working for involves not merely an attack on economic evils but communal action to diffuse the means of enjoyment and culture, and that it will mark its determination to spend liberally the spiritual, as well as the material, necessities of civilisation by enabling the long-neglected project of a National Theatre at length to be realised.

### MAJOR FRANK VERNON

I believe in the establishment of a National Theatre in London because it would give the People a theatre of their own and it would set a standard of dramatic art in a country where there is none to-day.

### MR. NORMAN WILKINSON

I am certainly in favour of a National Theatre for London. My views on the subject have already been expressed (was it "in DRAMA?") by Cochran. I feel I need not say more, but just refer you to his (to my mind) very true statement.

### PROFESSOR J. DOVER WILSON

Of course I most heartily approve of the project for a National Theatre and shall be glad if my name is of any use to your League.

As for "arguments in its favour," I have tried to advance some on pp. 12-15 of *The Elizabethan Audience* (the Annual Shakespeare Lecture for 1929, read before the British Academy.)

The following have confined their replies to a statement of general, but emphatic, approval of the National Theatre project as outlined in our letter.

THE REV. CYRIL ALINGTON, D.D.  
VISCOUNT ALLENBY, K.C.B.  
ARCHBISHOP LORD DAVIDSON  
THE ARCHBISHOP OF YORK  
MR. ROBERT ATKINS  
THE RT. HON. STANLEY BALDWIN, M.P.  
SIR JAMES BARRIE, BART., O.M.  
THE HON. OLIVER BRETT, M.B.E.  
SIR HARRY BRITTAIN  
MR. JOHN BUCHAN, M.P.  
PROF. E. T. CAMPAGNAC  
DR. BERNARD CHILDS  
THE RT. HON. WINSTON CHURCHILL, M.P.  
MR. SYDNEY C. COCKERELL  
MR. DUFF COOPER  
MR. W. A. DARLINGTON  
LADY DENMAN  
PROF. E. J. DENT  
SIR EDWARD ELGAR, O.M.  
MR. ARCHIBALD FLOWER  
MISS ELSIE FOGERTY  
MR. EDWARD GARNETT

CAPTAIN HARRY GRAHAM  
SIR BEN GREET  
DR. L. HADEN GUEST  
SIR HENRY HADOW  
MR. J. L. HAMMOND  
LT.-COL. CUTHBERT HEADLAM, D.S.O.  
THE RT. HON. JOHN W. HILLS, P.C., M.P.  
PROF. J. A. HOBSON  
MR. LAURENCE HOUSMAN  
PROF. L. P. JACKS  
SIR BARRY JACKSON  
DAME MADGE KENDAL, D.B.E.  
MR. ROBERT LORAIN  
SIR SIDNEY LOW  
PROF. J. W. MACKAIL, LL.D.  
MR. DESMOND MACCARTHY  
MR. COMPTON MACKENZIE  
SIR DONALD MACLEAN, M.P.  
THE RT. HON. REGINALD MCKENNA, P.C.  
MR. J. J. MALLON,  
COL. MALONE, M.P.  
MR. EDWARD MARSH, C.B.  
MR. CYRIL MAUDE  
MR. W. LEE MATHEWS  
SIR FRANK MEYER, BART.  
MR. A. M. MONKHOUSE  
HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF MONTROSE  
THE HON. EVAN MORGAN  
MR. P. MORLEY HORDER  
MR. ROBERT NEWMAN  
MR. CONAL O'RIORDAN  
THE HON. W. G. ORMSBY GORE, M.P.  
THE COUNTESS OF OXFORD  
SIR BERNARD PARTRIDGE  
MR. EDEN PHILLPOTTS  
THE REV. ARNOLD PINCHARD  
SIR ARTHUR PINERO  
PROF. ALFRED W. POLLARD, C.B.  
MR. ROGER QUILTER  
SIR HARRY R. REICHEL  
MR. CHARLES RICKETTS, R.A.  
MR. ERNEST RHYS  
PROF. J. G. ROBERTSON  
PROF. WILLIAM ROTHESTEIN  
CAPTAIN R. P. P. ROWE,  
PROF. ERNEST DE SELINCOURT  
MRS. PHILIP SNOWDEN  
MR. J. C. SQUIRE  
DAME MERIEL TALBOT, D.B.E.  
MISS MARIE TEMPEST  
MR. CHARLES TENNYSON, C.M.G.  
MR. C. STANFORD TERRY  
PROF. A. J. TOYNBEE  
MR. W. J. TURNER  
SIR LAWRENCE WEAVER  
SIR ROBERT WITT  
MR. P. G. WODEHOUSE  
DR. C. HAGBERG WRIGHT  
DR. R. VAUGHAN WILLIAMS  
SIR ARTHUR YAPP  
SIR FRANCIS YOUNGHUSBAND

Statements of a qualified kind have also been received from Messrs. James Agate, Arnold Bennett, Prof. Patrick Geddes and one or two others. For reasons of space, their views have been held over to the next number which will also contain a sonnet, "For a National Theatre," specially written by Dr. Alfred Perceval Graves.

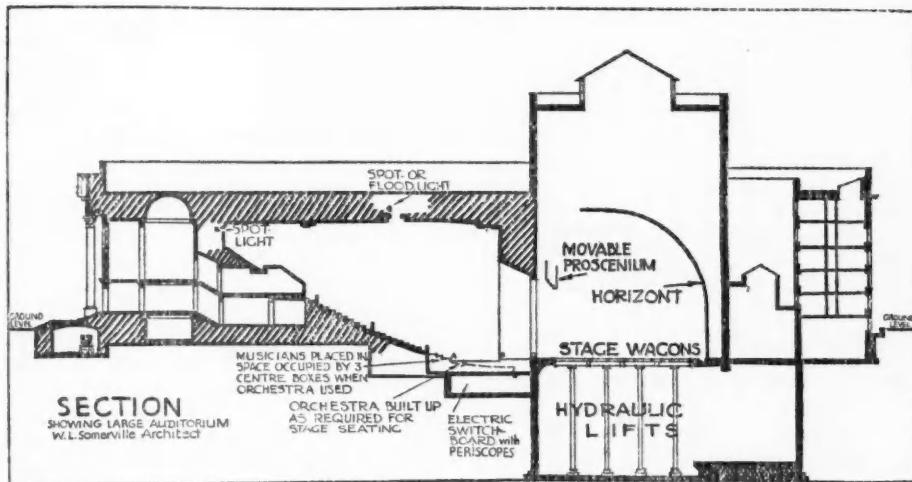
# PLANS FOR A NATIONAL THEATRE

IN 1924 The British Drama League organised a competition for designs for a National Theatre, and the result was announced at the Annual Meeting of the League held that year at the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley, where the prize designs were on view during the Exhibition.

The prize-winner was Mr. W. L. Somerville of Toronto, and his drawings were reproduced in the July number of DRAMA, 1924. Readers are referred for fuller infor-

mation to that issue, but for general convenience, we reprint here four of the designs together with some of the notes thereon (slightly revised) which were contributed to DRAMA at the time by Mr. Harley Granville-Barker.

A noticeable feature of the designs is, in accordance with the conditions laid down for the competition, the double auditoria. Mr. Granville-Barker explains below the purpose of this condition and comments upon the means taken by Mr. Somerville to fulfil it.



## NOTES BY HARLEY GRANVILLE-BARKER

### *The Two Auditoria.*

This will be a more than desirable feature of any National Theatre, and for several reasons. The company of actors cannot be merely a stock company, either in the old sense of the term, with each actor allotted a "line" of parts; or in the modern sense, a company just sufficient for the filling of the longest likely cast, and at work day and night without a pause, acting and rehearsing. By the old stock system with its lines of parts, the classics were reduced, more often than not, to formalism and monotony (salvation lay only in the occasional arising of a Kean

or a Siddons), while the modern drama could not have been played at all. The modern stock-system stands for plays insufficiently rehearsed and for exhausted actors. A National Theatre must accept the standard of careful rehearsing set by the long run system. And, while true repertory work will make for versatility it must have a company large and representative enough to give the producer of the classics and the contemporary author all the choice he needs in the casting of his play. It follows that with but one stage to work on useful actors would often be left idle. Conceive a company between sixty

## PLANS FOR A NATIONAL THEATRE

and seventy strong and a season in which two or three plays with comparatively small casts were the outstanding successes. This would leave two-thirds of the company idle for nearly half the time. It would be great economic waste to start with; for another thing, good actors would not put up with it.

Further, a smaller auditorium will encourage and permit the management to perform plays with a "minority" appeal. No one supposes that "*Troilus and Cressida*," "*Love's Labour's Lost*," "*All's Well That Ends Well*" are likely to become popular favourites, nor many first-rate modern plays that it would be the duty of a National Theatre to include in its repertory. Acted they must be, but what could be worse than to play them to an audience of seven or eight hundred (not an inconsiderable audience, however) in a theatre built to hold double that number or more. But it would be the business of a National Theatre to consult all legitimate tastes, those of audiences that assemble in hundreds as well as in thousands. It is equally the business of any management to fill its theatre as often as it honourably can.

It has been urged against a National Theatre that it is sure to become the home of all that is academic and trite; that it will be averse from experiment; that the new men, of whatever generation, will have no chance there. And it is true that with only an auditorium of eighteen hundred to fill experiment is difficult. But in a small house risks can be run, and plays might be nursed to popularity which would die of chill in a half empty big one. Moreover, there are the junior members of the company to be thought of. The smaller theatre could give them many a chance which they'd wait for long in the big one. And actors of promise easily tire of waiting; the records of State theatres are full of the losses of good men who were impatient of the vested interests above them.

A dozen more advantages could be found in the existence of this second and smaller auditorium. But comprehensively it comes to this: the management will need *elasticity of opportunity*; it must be able to produce the greatest possible variety of plays under the most economical conditions.

It would be unwise, on the other hand, to reduce the size of the larger house. If a production is a success all the money possible must be made out of it; and—since a repertory will be in being and other plays will have their claim—made in as few performances as possible. Moreover, plays that are popular in the true sense, should be given now and then at very popular prices. And the larger (within reason) the auditorium the easier it is to do this. It will be found, I think, that there is no comparable repertory theatre on the Continent, which would not be glad, under present economic conditions, of the resource of two houses. The new National Theatre at Budapest has two, and its management considers them a necessity.

### *The Apron Stages and the Greek "Orchestra."*

The need of an apron stage for the playing of Shakespeare may not yet be beyond dispute. But opinion on the point is at least too strong to be defied. And it is not a thing that can be added to a theatre otherwise designed: lines of sight will be upset. Mr. Somerville, obedient to the conditions imposed, provides for an apron stage in both auditoria (and for a Greek orchestra in both, too, though this was not required). But it can be removed, and rows of stalls can take its place. So either method of production can be followed.

### *The Form of the Auditorium.*

The obligations forced on him Mr. Somerville has faced boldly. To secure good lines of sight he has adopted the "Bayreuth" plan (which in essence is the plan of a Greek theatre). The drawback to this is, that it throws the furthest spectators to a great distance from the stage in the larger theatre 110 feet, in the smaller 75 feet. It may be questioned whether a compromise could not be made over at least the last twelve rows of the larger theatre. If these could be steeply banked by the help of a shallow gallery, that is, if the whole auditorium could be brought to all intents and purposes under the main ceiling, it might be better. The only other sacrifice made is of stage

## PLANS FOR A NATIONAL THEATRE

boxes, not a great one in a theatre where people wish (presumably) to see rather than be seen. The actual box accommodation may be thought a little unusual. Boxes in such a theatre, however, are mainly for ceremony; they should have consideration, but the more general amenity must not be sacrificed. These side boxes—a little more privacy secured them—would suffice. The others are more open to criticism, but they are hardly needed in any case.

It should be noted that the traditional semi-circular fashion of seating has been preserved. This is important; it keeps the audience in a living relation to each other as well as to the play.

In both instances the horizontal lines of sight are excellent. Here is one of the great advantages of this sort of auditorium. The suggestions for the placing of an orchestra do not show much resource. But this is a difficult problem, and in comparison with others, not a vital one.

### *The Stages and their Mechanism.*

The larger stage is 135 ft. wide by 80 ft. deep, with a proscenium opening of 44 ft. This is full wide an opening; but a movable proscenium reduces it. The smaller stage measures 135 ft. by 64 ft., and its proscenium opening is 30 ft. There is ample side room; a most important thing from the scene-shifting point of view. Moreover, hydraulic lifts are provided for the removal of scenery, with a drop of 48 ft.

The arrangements for access to the stages are open to criticism, or to question, at any rate. There seems no good property-room accommodation. For the larger stage the supers' dressing-rooms might better be used for this. The Green room is wrongly placed: it would do well for a waiting-room.

The arrangements for the electric switch-board and for the use of periscopes are admirable.

### *The Rehearsal Rooms.*

A repertory theatre must be first of all considered not as a pleasant place in which audiences assemble to see a production—the finished product, but as a factory in which forty or fifty of these

productions can be economically turned out during a year. And for this purpose rehearsal rooms are a chief necessity. Mr. Somerville provides five, and they would be none too many. Moreover, they contain not only stages of the working size (practically) of the two theatres, but auditoria of their own, from which a producer can focus the action. And this is all but a necessity, too. With a constantly changing bill, constant rehearsals upon the stages will not be possible. Moreover, in light and labour, and by delay and overtime, nothing is more expensive. Rehearsal rooms in which one can really rehearse will save money enough to make many a play profitable. There should be lifts, however, to carry the necessary furniture and properties from the stages to the rooms and back. These the architect has not provided: but they could be pretty easily contrived.

### *Scene-Store and Workshops.*

It will be noticed that the scene-store and most of the workshops are in a practically isolated block. Only so, presumably, will the London County Council permit scenery to be stored at all. But much is involved in this. The expense of carrying scenery to a distance for storage is very great, the damage done to the scenery is deplorable. If the scenery for such a theatre as this can be made and stored on the premises literally thousands of pounds a year can be saved. By Mr. Somerville's arrangement (which needs very little amending) between twenty and thirty full-size productions could be kept in the theatre, and moved between shop, store and stage with the minimum of labour by lift and electric trolley.

### *The Front of the House. The Library.*

This needs little comment. One is glad to see ample "foyer" room and good coat rooms. It is to be hoped that an habitual audience would not forever make itself uncomfortable by sitting tangled with its hats and wraps; and if it could move in and out of its seats with ease (as in most theatres to-day it cannot) would acquire the habit of filling the foyers between the acts and letting the auditorium be aired.

## PLANS FOR A NATIONAL THEATRE

Finally, it is the library which should mark this theatre out from all others as the National Theatre. For its primary purpose: year by year the writing upon dramatic art and literature grows in bulk and importance. Where better could it be seriously studied? Books apart, the activities of such a theatre as this, its prompt books, sketches and records of productions

will come to have great value. Moreover, it can be upon occasion a lecture room, where the purely educational side of the theatre's work can be forwarded. And it will be the right place in which to welcome dramatists, critics and distinguished men and women of the theatre from other lands—when we have a theatre to which we may be proud to welcome them.

## PLAYS OF THE MONTH

By C. B. Purdom

I HAVE had a great deal of pleasure in the theatre during the past month. As a critic one does not go for pleasure, but for judgment. Pleasure does not come into it at all; but I found myself, by the way as it were, enjoying what I had to see, and I am glad to admit it, for once. I started off, however, with a disappointment. Mr. Galsworthy's new play, "The Roof," possessed all the characteristic Galsworthian qualities, but Mr. Galsworthy did not show sufficient interest in his people, himself, to make them interest us. It is not the weakest of his plays, but it is very nearly so.

Mr. Sean O'Casey's "The Silver Tassie," which has floored many people as a book, was an undoubted success on the stage. The play is a difficult one, and has glaring faults, but it displays Mr. O'Casey's astonishing genius. In the second act, which shows the Front during the war, it is overwhelmingly impressive; it presents the devastating spirit of the war, rather than its details, without realism or natural movement or speech. It is in direct contrast to the method of "Journey's End," and no one who sees it will, I think, ever forget it.

The production of this play is a bold undertaking on Mr. C. B. Cochran's part. English actors should not have been given the Irish parts, because very few Englishmen can play Irish roles, and the production by Mr. Raymond Massey, though clever, was, to my mind, greatly lacking in imaginative quality.

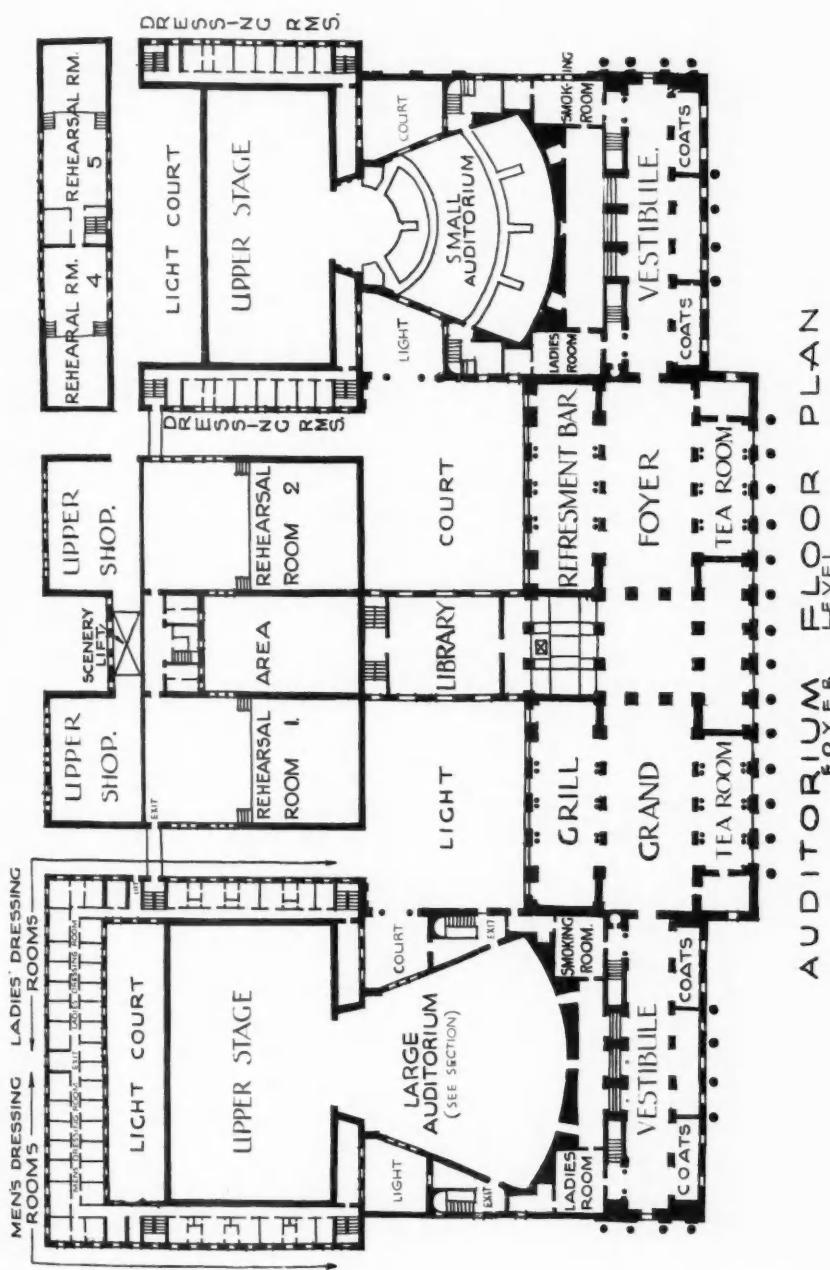
Mr. Philip Ridgeway's Chekhov season at the Fortune Theatre has been an outstanding success. This is deserved, for,

though the productions can be criticised because few English actors abandon themselves to the spiritual demands that these plays make upon them, the production of Mr. Komisarjevsky gives an idea of Chekhov's genius. To see these plays is an experience in life. No one should miss them.

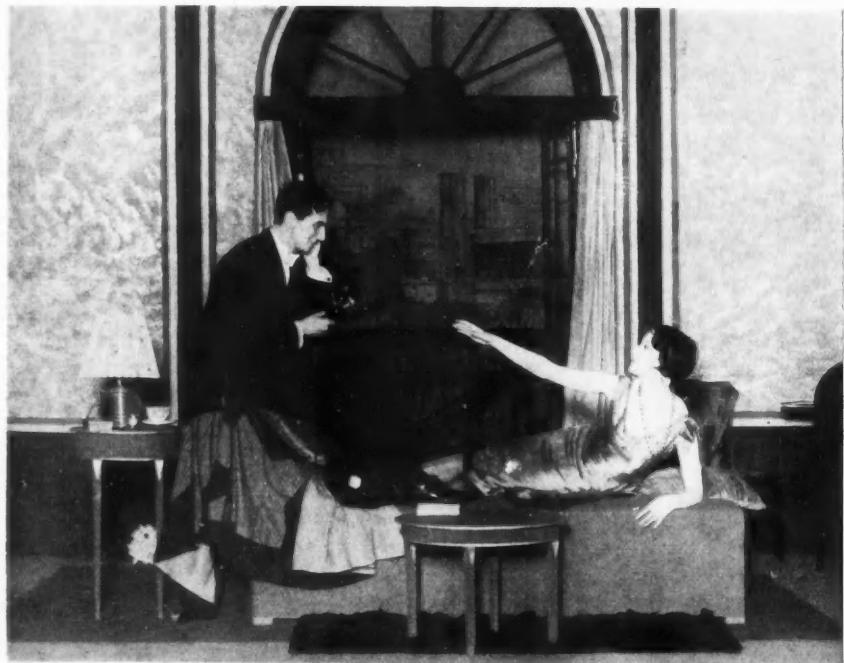
I greatly enjoyed Heijermans's "The Rising Sun," at the Kingsway Theatre. It is a domestic play with a simple plot, and one to which amateurs might well give their attention. It is very well played, and produced. Miss Angela Baddeley acts magnificently.

Sir Nigel Playfair took off "La Vie Parisienne," before it seemed to have exhausted its run, and put on a programme of two plays, "Gladstone's Comforter," by Lawrence Housman, and Henley and Stevenson's "Beau Austin." The Housman play had too fine a point for the stage, and needed better production than Sir Nigel gave it to justify its appearance. "Beau Austin" was a delicious piece of amateur stage-writing—having been written by men of no dramatic accomplishments, and it was played by Mr. Bertram Wallis and Miss Marie Ney with proper wit and sentiment.

A new theatrical club has been opened in New Compton Street, called "The Players' Theatre," which started with a play by Clemence Dane and Helen Simpson, entitled "Gooseberry Fool." It is a comedy that inclines to farce, with a surprisingly silly ending, but it was, on the whole, well done. The productions at this little theatre should be worth watching.



NATIONAL THEATRE PLAN  
ARCHITECT: W. L. SOMERVILLE



*Photo: Mr. Ashford, Northampton.*

ACT I. SCENE I. FROM "THE QUEEN WAS IN THE PARLOUR," AS PRODUCED BY THE NORTHAMPTON REPERTORY PLAYERS ON THE OCCASION OF THE DRAMA LEAGUE CONFERENCE. NADYA: MISS VIVIENNE BENNETT. SABIEN: MR. GODFREY KENTON. THE PLAY PRODUCED BY HERBERT M. PRENTICE, SCENERY DESIGNED BY THE PRODUCER AND EXECUTED IN THE REPERTORY WORKSHOPS

## BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE NOTES



### THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

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LORD HOWARD DE WALDEN.

Chairman of the Council:

H. GRANVILLE-BARKER.

Secretary: GEOFFREY WHITWORTH.

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MSS. for publication in DRAMA will be considered if accompanied by stamps for return if unsuitable. All Enquiries should be addressed to the Hon. Secretary, at the Offices of the League, 8 Adelphi Terrace, London, W.C.2.

Telephone: GERRARD 8011

Neither the Editor nor the Drama League as a whole accepts any responsibility for the opinions expressed in signed articles printed in this Journal.

THE resolutions passed at the Northampton Conference have now all been considered by the Council of the League. The present number of DRAMA gives evidence of the manner in which Mr. Young's motion on the National Theatre is being implemented. As to the circulation of plays among members of the League, lists will be drawn up and published from time to time in DRAMA or by a special leaflet. Further, amateur societies desiring to read original plays in MS. are invited to send their names and addresses to the Editor, and these will be printed in DRAMA so that playwrights may have an opportunity of knowing what particular societies are specially anxious to try out new work. Finally, when the Council is strengthened by the presence of the ten new members to be elected under the scheme for provincial representation, measures will at once be taken to consider the question of district organization as raised at the Conference by Miss Macnamara and Mr. Rowlands.

Several of our usual features are held over this month, including the literary

page usually contributed by Mr. Norman Marshall. We would, however, draw the attention of our readers to a book which has lately appeared by Mr. Dudley Stuart Page, Solicitor of the Supreme Court of Judicature and President of the National Dramatic and Operatic Association. It is entitled "The Law of the Amateur Stage," and it is published by Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons at 5s. net. Among other items, the volume contains concise and authoritative information upon such questions as the Entertainments Duty, Licensing of Stage Plays, the Law of Copyright, Sunday Performances, Employment of Children in Theatres, and matters relating generally to the law as it affects the amateur stage. A useful index is supplied, and an appendix reprinting the various necessary forms in regard to Entertainments Tax. Such a volume as this which contents itself with a bare statement of the law must, of course, be read with intelligence, as the author in most cases leaves the facts to speak for themselves. The facts, however, are admirably set out, and Play Producing Societies and Little Theatres, who act in accordance with them, will be free from a good deal of that anxiety which at present too often attends their steps in the dark.

The Drama League takes pride in the appearance of the Ardrossan and Saltcoats Players for a four-weeks' season at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, where they are presenting that well-known musical interlude, "A Nicht wi' Burns," and Sir James's Barrie's "The Old Lady Shows Her Medals." The latter we all remember as the winning play in the 1928 National Festival of Community Drama, and also the winner of the Belasco Cup at the New York Little Theatre Tournament in the same year. It would seem that these players have if anything increased in skill since the days of the competition, and the applause of an ordinary London theatre audience night after night shows how perfectly Mr. Woodburn's company is able to hold its own with the professional companies of the hour. We congratulate these Scottish players, as well as Sir Nigel Playfair for his perspicacity in bringing them to London.

# THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

Report of the Proceedings, October 25-26th, 1929

The Mayor, welcoming the visitors at the Guildhall on the Friday afternoon said that he felt it a great honour that Northampton should have been chosen for the conference. He trusted the delegates would enjoy their visit, and that they would be interested in the various notable places in the district.

Mr. Holford Knight, M.P., in thanking the Mayor, said : These annual conferences furnished an opportunity for an interchange of experiences and views regarding prospects and developments of the stage. Members were particularly glad to come to Northampton because they would have an opportunity of seeing the fine work of the Northampton Repertory Players. They hoped one of the results of the visit would be that townspeople would rally to the support of that splendid institution. He proposed a vote of thanks to the Mayor, as representing the town, and to the numerous persons connected with the town and county who had co-operated in making the preparations.

Mr. Alec Rea (Hon. Treasurer of the Drama League), seconding the vote, mentioned that one of the chief advantages of membership was the use of the only real theatrical library in the country, which was housed in the very beautiful rooms of 8 Adelphi Terrace.

Mrs. Helen Panther welcomed the visitors on behalf of the directors of the Opera House.

In the evening the delegates and many others interested in the drama attended the Opera House to witness a notably fine performance of "The Queen was in the Parlour" by the Repertory Players.

Before the play came an address by Lord Lytton. Col. Cecil Malone, M.P., presided, supported by Lord and Lady Lytton, the Mayor and Mayoress, Lord and Lady Henley, Mr. F. O. Roberts, M.P. Mrs. Whitworth Watson, Mr. Geoffrey Whitworth, Mr. Alec Rea, Mr. Herbert M. Prentice, Mr. Reginald Brown, F.L.A

(borough librarian), Mr. W. H. Horton, Mr. W. J. Bassett-Lowke, Mrs. Frank Panther, M.B.E., Mr. H. Musk Beattie, Mr. Francis Graves, and Mr. Skinner.

Col. Malone said that he had always been interested in the drama, but he confessed he had always found real life more interesting than the drama presented at most theatres.

Introducing Lord Lytton, Col. Malone said that gentleman had been singularly fortunate in his ancestors. He was a grandson of the great Lord Lytton, who, whilst he occupied a high position in diplomacy, was yet able to carry on dramatic work. Bulwer Lytton's had been, and was still, a great name. The present Lord Lytton most worthily carried on the tradition, being distinguished both as a politician and as a patron of the Arts.

## LORD LYTTON'S ADDRESS

Lord Lytton's speech centred in the great desire of the British Drama League—the desire for a National Repertory Theatre. First he paid a tribute to the value of the repertory theatres, for they were, he said, raising the standard of drama in the country. English people had hitherto been so accustomed to the commercial theatre, where a play ran so long as it could fill the house, that they were perhaps rather slow to appreciate the value of the repertory theatre. Lord Lytton referred then to France, "which country possesses the greatest national repertory theatre in the world," and said he would never be content until we had in England a national theatre with such a reputation. He had no quarrel, however, with the commercial theatre, for there were many theatres under the guidance of distinguished actor-managers in London that had produced great plays.

Lord Lytton went on to deal with the attitude of the playwright and the playgoer. A play was a form of literature designed to be performed on the stage,

## THE CONFERENCE AT NORTHAMPTON

and a play that was described as a play to read and one that would not stand acting was not a play at all. As for the playgoer, one of the main necessities in drama was the study of the development of dramatic literature throughout the years, and the comparing of the plays of one generation with those of another. But with the exception of Shakespeare, we had very little opportunity of noticing the transitional stages from the age of Shakespeare and Sheridan to Wilde and Pinero.

Lord Lytton next referred to the pioneers of the repertory movement, Miss Horniman, Miss Lilian Baylis, Miss Lena Ashwell, Sir Barry Jackson. "The only proper apex for the repertory movement throughout this country," he said, "is the establishment of a National Repertory Theatre in the capital of our Empire." Lord Lytton expressed the hope, too, that the scheme would be sufficiently comprehensive to enable half the company to be always on tour—(applause)—so that the chief provincial cities and our Empire abroad could have the opportunity of seeing the actors.

On Saturday the proceedings began with an inspection of the stage and studio of the Opera House under the guidance of Mr. Prentice.

The work of the conference proper was then proceeded with in the Lecture Hall of the Carnegie Public Library under the chairmanship of Mr. Geoffrey Whitworth. The proceedings are reported below.

In the evening, after an informal dinner at the Angel Hotel, presided over by Lord Henley, the delegates repaired once more to the Public Library where Prof. Gilbert Murray gave a most valuable address on "Dramatic Training"—the substance of which it is hoped to print in a forthcoming issue of DRAMA. There were also two excellent performances by representative teams of the Northampton Federation of Women's Institutes. First, two scenes from the fourth act of "Henry VIII," performed by the Harlestone Women's Institute and secondly, "The Patchwork Quilt," performed by a mixed group organized by Lady Henley, who herself gave a beautiful performance of the Old Lady. In "Henry VIII," too, Miss Gladys Hughes was noticeably effective as Queen Katharine. During the evening the delegates and a large general audience admired the excellent collection of stage models which had been brought together in one of the rooms of the Library.

Sunday brought many delegates to the Parish Church where a special sermon was preached by the Vicar, the Rev. Trevor Lewis. This, also, we hope to print in a subsequent issue of the magazine. Finally, the Conference concluded with a luncheon given by Lord and Lady Henley at Watford Court. Over a hundred delegates had accepted this generous invitation, Mr. Lingard and Miss Radford voiced in short speeches the general feeling of gratitude to host and hostess.

## MINUTES OF THE CONFERENCE

THE Tenth Annual Conference of the British Drama League was held on Saturday, October 26, 1929, at Northampton. Mr. Geoffrey Whitworth, in the chair, and 109 delegates and individual members were present.

1. *The minutes of the last Conference held at Sheffield which had been circulated were taken as read and signed.*

*Arising out of Minutes.*

The Chairman referred to the Constitution of the League which had been revised as a result of last year's Conference. The new rules would appear in the November DRAMA. He reminded those present that the new Council would include ten members to be elected by ballot from the ten Districts into which Britain had been divided. At the present Conference resolutions passed would be for the first time mandatory on the Council.

2. (a) *The following resolution was moved by Mr. Lunn (Huddersfield Thespians) and seconded by Mrs. Porter:*

That this Conference requests the British Drama League to publish monthly a list of new plays, whether printed or manuscript, which can be performed by amateurs.

Mr. Lunn stated that it was becoming increasingly difficult to find new plays of merit and his Society were anxious that MS. plays should be circulated more freely than at present.

The Hon. Mary Pakington (Village Drama Society), speaking from the Dramatists' point of view, supported the resolution.

Mr. Boughton Chatwin (Birmingham Amateur Dramatic Federation), considered a mere list of plays would not be very helpful—he suggested a list

## MINUTES OF THE NORTHAMPTON CONFERENCE

of plays with name of author, number of characters and short description would be better.

Mr. Weston Wells (West Lewisham Community Players) suggested that the word "periodically" should be substituted for "monthly."

Mr. Lunn agreed to this amendment.

Mr. Hannam-Clark (Glos. Societies) inquired if the list would appear in DRAMA. It was felt that this should be left to the discretion of the Council.

Mr. Rowlands (Swinton Players) suggested that the name and address of Societies wishing to read new plays should also be printed with the list.

Mr. Lingard (Stockport Garrick) pointed out the difficulty of finding new plays of any merit.

Mr. Rea stated that as a West-End theatre manager, he experienced great difficulty in finding good plays. He had once offered £100 and a production in the West End for a new play and not one was found good enough for production.

Mr. Purdon supported this resolution, as he also had spent much time in reading MS. plays, none of which were worth production.

The resolution in its amended form was read as follows:

*That this Conference requests the British Drama League to publish periodically a list of new plays which can be performed by amateurs, whether printed or manuscript, with full description of each.*

and on being put to the vote was carried unanimously.

2. (b) The following resolution was proposed by Mr. Lunn (Huddersfield Thespians), and seconded by Mr. Linsley Thomas (Bath Playgoers' Club).

That this Conference regrets that the British Drama League has not made sufficient progress over the matter of percentage terms and once more urges the Council to do its utmost to secure these terms from agents and authors.

In speaking to this resolution, Mr. Lunn stated that his Society had kept to its decision to perform only those plays by authors who would accept payment by a percentage on the takings. He thought the time had come when other Societies should join in this boycott, and he asked that membership of the League should be confined to Societies who would agree to this course.

Mr. Linsley Thomas in seconding this resolution, stated that his Club read plays only, and that they had met with great courtesy from most dramatists, but there were a certain number who exacted three to five guineas for the reading of their plays.

Mr. Bayliffe (Preston Co-operative Dramatic Society) stated that the services rendered by the League to affiliated Societies were so magnificent that it seemed a pity it had not been able to confer the great benefit of establishing the percentage system.

Mr. Sladen-Smith (Unnamed Society) thought that this very ancient topic was no nearer solution. It was impossible for the League to force authors to accept percentage terms, nor could it force societies to pay percentage terms. Societies did not realize the amount of trouble and work involved on the dramatist when percentage terms were granted, but

he thought that if societies would favour percentage plays when possible and would pay the amount due promptly, the dramatists would change their views.

Mr. Hannam-Clark stated that he had listened to this hardy annual for many years and he regretted the element of censure in the resolution. He did not think it was possible for the League to do more than it had done. He moved an amendment as follows:

*That this Conference once more urges the Council to do its utmost to secure percentage terms from agents and authors.*

This amendment was seconded by Mr. Norris (Godalming Play Reading Circle), who stated that he thought the authors had a grievance in that there were a number of plays on which no fees were paid. He asked the League to assert its authority to persuade its members to pay fees promptly when due.

Mrs. Bacon (West Herts Players) pointed out that so many societies were not affiliated to the League that a boycott organized by members of the League only would be ineffective.

The Chairman then read the resolution as above amended.

It was accepted in this form by Mr. Lunn, and on being put to the vote was carried.

3. The following resolution was moved by Mr. Robert Young, M.P.

*That this Conference of the British Drama League, believing that the Government is in sympathy with the idea and establishment of a National Theatre and would favourably consider a practical and agreed scheme to this end, requests the Council to take early and energetic measures to achieve this great object.*

In speaking to his motion, Mr. Young stated that a certain amount of scepticism had perhaps entered into the minds of most people when considering the question of a National Theatre. He read a letter from Mr. Bernard Shaw stating that no-one cared tuppence about a National Theatre and he could not honestly advise Mr. Young to put his shoulder to it—he would be baffled by the national cold shoulder. For twenty years the Shakespeare Memorial Committee had been begging for subscriptions with no result. This letter Mr. Young interpreted as a plea to "get a move on." He explained that he had brought this resolution forward in consequence of the Prime Minister's reply to a question about the National Theatre in the House of Commons last July. This reply was undoubtedly an invitation to those interested to "get together." Unfortunately, the British Theatre was in the grip of commerce and until it could free itself from this commercial tyranny, it would not be able to reveal itself as a thing of beauty and a joy for ever. There was little hope of being able to interest the vast number of our population in the National Theatre, but as a minority we could achieve our object and the majority would then look on this achievement with pride. We were doing an honourable and worthy thing to press for a National Theatre. There were

## MINUTES OF THE NORTHAMPTON CONFERENCE

two practical ways by which the cause could be furthered:

1. By defining what is meant by a National Theatre.
2. By propagating the idea.

It was obvious that the National Theatre should be a building worthy of the Empire and of the dramatists who have done such honour to the English tongue. The cost would be, at least, half-a-million pounds. Mr. Young continued that he would like the theatre to be a magnificent Temple of British Drama incorporating a workshop to which men and women would bring zeal and enthusiasm—it would, of course, be a Repertory Theatre in the fullest sense. It would also encourage new playwrights aiming at interesting the great mass of the people. Mr. Young stated that he hoped and believed the necessary money would be forthcoming from the Government, but no Government would provide money for a National Theatre, unless it is pushed by a strong volume of public opinion. Mr. Young informed the Conference that Mr. Granville-Barker was issuing a new edition of the book "The National Theatre" written by Mr. William Archer and himself in 1904. This would be published in January and every member of the League should make a point of reading it. The British Drama League had not yet realized its potential power—its 1,600 affiliated societies represented many thousands of individuals outstripping in its influence the Professional Theatre.

In conclusion, Mr. Young urged the Conference not only to pass the resolution before it, but to follow it up with propaganda in every direction.

Mr. Norman Marshall, in seconding the resolution stressed the importance of the workshop as an integral part of the National Theatre.

Before opening the discussion, the Chairman read a letter from the Home Secretary, Mr. J. R. Clynes, supporting the motion (*This letter is printed on page 34*).

Mr. Holford Knight, M.P., stated that there were certain facts which should be made clear. Mr. Bernard Shaw was becoming a perennial fount of inaccuracies. The Shakespeare Memorial Committee had not asked for donations for fifteen years. The Committee had met last week and was taking immediate steps to collect all friends of the National Theatre in the most catholic sense, and they were proposing to revive the deputation to the Prime Minister which was inaugurated in 1924. The Committee would welcome every possible help that this League could give in achieving its great object. He concluded by cordially supporting Mr. Young's resolution.

Mr. Rowlands (Swinton Players) supported the idea of a Travelling Company sent out by the National Theatre. He hoped that Theatre would not remain merely a London "stunt."

Mr. Alec Rea stated that as a commercial theatre manager he would welcome a National Theatre, but as a taxpayer he was opposed to it. He was appalled by the cost of the scheme which he estimated after reading Mr. Granville-Barker's book as being nearer two million pounds. He foresaw that the Theatre would be dull and depressing—a place for school children—furthermore, he asked, who would be in control of it?

Mr. Weston Wells stated that it would depend very largely on the public whether the Theatre would be dull and run for schoolchildren. This was not an argument against the National Theatre.

Mrs. Porter protested against this slur on schoolchildren.

Mr. Marshall pointed out that fewer plays were being written by intelligent people every year, and a National Theatre would undoubtedly encourage authors who now give up their time to writing novels.

Mr. Sladen-Smith feared that the National Theatre would be dull and inefficient, an eyesore and an earsore.

Mr. Purdon stated that he thought it would be a good idea if the British Drama League could formulate a scheme, but it had a very difficult task to make its propaganda successful.

The Chairman explained that before the war the main purpose of the Shakespeare Memorial Committee was to erect a National Theatre to celebrate the Shakespeare Tercentenary in 1916. The war came and that project was abortive. The chief reason for the scheme being brought forward now and from a somewhat different angle, was the encouraging answer of the Prime Minister to Mr. Young's question in the House. What was lacking at the moment was a definite scheme, and this Council would engage themselves to draw up on the lines of Mr. Granville-Barker's book. He further suggested that a permanent centre, and a tradition must be established before a Travelling Company could be sent out.

The motion, on being put to the vote, was carried by 62 votes to 10.

The Conference then adjourned for lunch.

### AFTERNOON SESSION

4. The following resolution had been sent in by Miss Madeleine Elliott :

That the British Drama League should endeavour to form County and Neighbourhood centres throughout the Empire with the primary object of keeping its members and affiliated societies in touch with all forms of local dramatic enterprise, urban or rural, professional and amateur.

The chairman read a letter from Miss Elliott regretting her absence and consequent inability to move the resolution in person. Having moved the resolution from the Chair, Mr. Whitworth asked Miss Macnamara to speak to it.

Miss Macnamara stated that in several places where she had lectured or held schools, the need for local dramatic centres had been urged upon her. Activities might include a Playgoers' Club, joint advertising and exchange performances.

Mr. Boughton Chatwin outlined the activities of the Birmingham Amateur Dramatic Federation which was functioning in exactly the way that was suggested by the motion.

Mr. Linsley Thomas opposed the motion. He considered that it was for each neighbourhood if it felt the need of such an organization to create the organization itself.

Mr. Rowlands stated that the Northern Community Drama Association had come into being, and he considered that such an association should

## MINUTES OF THE NORTHAMPTON CONFERENCE

become an integral part of the League's organization. The N.C.D.A. had received applications for membership from many non-members of the League.

Dr. Childs supported Mr. Rowlands's suggestion.

The Chairman stated that if this resolution were passed, the Council would be under the obligation of going into the scheme in detail—and two methods suggested themselves:

1. To build up new organizations in various areas.

2. Take the existing four areas of the Festival and empower them with functions outside the Festival.

A difficulty arose in connection with the second suggestion as the Western Area was not an homogeneous unit.

Mr. Richardson (Worthen Players, Shrewsbury) stated that he thought the resolution would be useful for rural areas.

Mr. Rowlands proposed an amendment to the effect that the words "shall endeavour" should be deleted and that the following sentence should be added to the resolution "and that where they exist area and local organizations shall be asked to undertake these functions." Miss Macnamara proposed a second amendment that the resolution should read as follows:

*That the British Drama League should encourage the growth of County and Neighbourhood centres throughout the Empire with the primary object of keeping its members and affiliated societies in touch with all forms of local dramatic enterprise, urban and rural, professional and amateur.*

This amendment, seconded by Mr. Childs, was put to the vote and passed.

The Chairman suggested that this resolution should be dealt with when the Council had the advantage of the advice of the Provincial members under the new rule. This was unanimously agreed.

5. The following resolution was moved by Miss Pendered and seconded by Mr. Weston Wells:

That the Drama League should take steps to obtain an alteration in the existing law which exacts the payment of Entertainment Tax on all Performances for Charity that do not show a profit.

Miss Pendered explained that in cases of performances for charity which showed a profit, the Entertainment Tax Authorities granted an exemption from tax, but if a loss was sustained, the tax had to be paid, and she urged the Council to use its influence to have this hardship removed.

Mr. Boughton Chatwin moved and Mr. Rowlands seconded the following amendment:

That the Drama League should take steps to obtain an alteration in the existing law which exacts the payment of Entertainment Tax so far as it affects its affiliated societies.

Mr. Marshall opposed the resolution and the amendment.

Dr. Childs thought that if performances could only be given if the profits were devoted to charity, no performances should be given at all.

The resolution and the amendment, on being put to the vote, were not carried.

### 6. Election of new National Committee for the National Festival of Community Drama.

The Chairman reported that three members were elected by the Conference for this committee, the present representatives being Mr. J. R. Gregson, Mr. F. E. Doran and Mr. C. B. Purdom. He read a letter from Mr. Gregson regretting his inability to stand again for election owing to pressure of work.

Mr. Hirst proposed, Mr. Thompson seconded and it was

*Resolved: "That Mr. Sharman should be elected."*

It was proposed by the Chairman and

*Resolved: "That Mr. Doran and Mr. Purdom should be re-elected."*

### 7. Place of next Conference.

The Chairman read a letter from Miss Radford of the Exeter Drama League, inviting the Conference to hold its 1930 meeting in Exeter. He reminded the Conference that the invitation from Hull was, presumably, still open, though it had not actually been renewed. The minutes of the last Conference were referred to, and it was found that it had been decided to accept the invitation from Hull, if it were renewed, on the first possible opportunity.

It was proposed by Mr. Hannam-Clark, seconded by Mr. Linsley Thomas and by a majority of forty votes

*Resolved: "That the invitation from the Exeter Drama League should be accepted."*

The Chairman proposed, Mr. Holford Knight seconded and it was unanimously

*Resolved: "That a hearty vote of thanks should be accorded to the Northampton Repertory Company, Mr. Bassett-Lowke, Mr. Herbert Prentice, Mr. Reginald Brown, and to Lord and Lady Henley for their kindness and hospitality to the League and its delegates."*

The meeting then closed.

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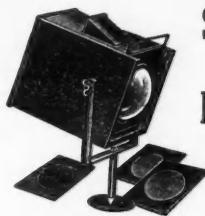
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